

2012 John Adams and John Quincy Adams
Pro Bono Publico Awards

DLA Piper

Hundreds of thousands of school children in this Commonwealth begin their school day by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, which declares this nation to be indivisible with liberty and justice for all. Children with severe disabilities who are not receiving the educational services to which they are entitled by law may not realize that the pledge of "justice for all" may be an illusion if they cannot afford an attorney to assist them. But those who have been fortunate enough to be represented by the DLA Piper law firm over the last several years will get the justice they are due even though they cannot afford legal counsel.

For the last several years, the partnership that DLA Piper has formed with Massachusetts Advocates for Children, or MAC, assisting children with disabilities has translated into over 4,000 hours of pro bono work by more than half of the attorneys and paralegals in

the Boston Office. This comprehensive program involves individual and class action representation of children in need, legislative reform, and important research resulting in critical new funding.

With DLA Piper attorneys by their side, 25 children with disabilities have received crucial educational placements and services. In one such case, DLA Piper represented a boy with Asperger's Syndrome in Federal District Court. Ultimately, Judge Patti Saris held that services that prepare disabled students over the age of sixteen for post-secondary education, employment and independent living are a legally mandated component of a free and appropriate public education. Devoting over 900 hours on this case alone, the attorneys' efforts resulted in the student gaining access to services to increase his social appropriateness, which greatly enhanced the student's potential to succeed in a future career as a computer programmer. Advocates from the Disability Law Center, with whom DLA Piper

collaborated on this case, said that working with the firm was the "gold standard" in pro bono partnerships.

In addition to representing individual students, DLA Piper and MAC recently brought a class-action lawsuit against the Boston Public Schools. Although schools are required to provide services to disabled three-year-olds transitioning from State early-intervention programs, there was a considerable backlog, and many children received no services at that critical developmental stage. While the case is still at an early stage, the City of Boston has already responded by developing a system to plan for the correct numbers of children transitioning at age three into the public school system, as well as creating twenty new classrooms to try and avoid harmful delays in services and placements for such children.

The success of this project was not just limited to litigators at DLA Piper - attorneys from the transactional department were also instrumental to the success of this project. Over the years, transactional

attorneys have provided start-up nonprofit assistance. They also assisted with research that expanded funding for many critical services for children with special needs. On the legislative front, they helped MAC to prepare legislation that would prevent the bullying of students with autism.

Through its focused education project, DLA Piper has helped to create a better future for many of the most vulnerable children of the Commonwealth. The firm's substantial and sustained pro bono commitment to this issue truly exemplifies the spirit of the Adams Award. The Court is honored to recognize your work and offers its great appreciation and heartfelt thanks.